



Did you know that the very first **EARTH DAY** was held on April 22, 1970 to emphasize the importance of protecting the environment? It is hard to imagine, but 31 years ago, people were just beginning to get concerned about how air and water pollution impacted our planet and the people who live here. The year before, in 1969, the two major U.S. news makers were the huge Santa Barbara oil spill and a river so polluted that it actually burned (Cleveland's Cuyahoga River).

While it is likely that the observance had more than one "father", it was Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin who proposed a national "teach-in" on the environment to be held on college campuses. He insisted that the first Earth Day's activities come from the "grassroots", so he recruited a team of students to lead and inspire participation across the country. Who would have believed that such an activity would be so successful and involve 1 in 10 Americans that first year? An estimated that 20 million people -- 10,000 elementary and high schools, 2,000 colleges, and over 1,000 communities -- participated in Earth Day 1970.

As a result of the events' extensive media attention, the national environmental movement was born, and people all across the country voiced their concern about pollution to local, state and federal politicians. In 1970, President Nixon created the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and Congress passed the Endangered Species Act, as well as strong amendments to the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts.

Senator Nelson hadn't planned for Earth Day to be more than a one-time observance to bring environmental issues to the attention of politicians in Washington, D.C. But once it got started in rural towns and big cities all across the country, the annual observance gained momentum and continues today.

Earth Day is a good time to think about how we can all help protect the environment around us. Are you willing to **REDUCE, REUSE, RECYCLE** and **RENEW**? This year, make it a point to get involved with planet Earth...and ask some friends to join you in committing to learn more about conserving and protecting our finite natural resources:

- ◆ Use only the water you need, and reuse it whenever possible. For example, put a plastic bucket in the shower with you to capture extra water and use it to water plants or for household cleaning purposes.
- ◆ Avoid buying bottled water -- refill your own portable container with tap water -- you may be surprised that it is of equal or better quality than what is bottled.
- ◆ Recycle aluminum cans, plastics, newspaper, tin, and glass whenever possible. Find a recycling center near you as well as a center for disposal of hazardous household items like empty paint cans and chemical containers.
- ◆ Plant new trees...they send off oxygen into the air.
- ◆ Help protect your local waterways from pollutants, including stormwater runoff that goes into the storm sewers and ends up in Galveston Bay. ■